**The University of Sheffield**

**Degree Congregation, 14 January 2016**

**GEORGE ROBERT ADAMS**

Vice-Chancellor,

When drafting this oration I was struck by the relevance of newspaper headlines to this congregation. For example, in the *Financial Times* on one day alone: ‘releasing more development land critical to solving the housing crisis’; ‘delaying building new runway in South East threatens UK’s competitiveness’; ‘arguments continue about landscaping new Thames bridge’; and ‘2015 Stirling Prize for architecture won by comprehensive school’. These headlines illustrate the importance of ‘place’ and ‘space’ to us. Many of today’s graduands are joining the built environment professions where their decisions will have huge impacts on economic performance, social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

Vice-Chancellor, Bob Adams, our honorary graduand, has made major contributions to ‘the making of place and the mediation of space’ and to championing ‘better buildings, communities and the environment’, to quote from the straplines of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Royal Institute of British Architects. He grew up in Brighton but, like many of his generation, his education was interrupted by the Second World War and he served with distinction in the RAF, flying numerous hazardous missions to the Balkans and Poland. Experiencing the horrors of war, he was determined to build a better Britain. On resuming his education, this time at University College London, he studied under two of the great gurus of architecture and planning, Professors Sir Patrick Abercrombie and Lord Holford. He won many prizes: a Rome finalist, a Sir Andrew Taylor prizeman, a British Institution Architectural Scholarship and a Royal Academy Award, the latter supporting graduate studies in planning, which he completed with distinction.

Bob Adams started his professional life in London before moving to Jamaica to become the architect for the campus of University College, West Indies. Returning to England he worked at the newly established Crawley New Town before joining the Sheffield practice of Hadfield Cawkwell Davidson, eventually becoming senior partner. Established in 1834, this is the longest-surviving architectural practice in the world. Here he brought together architects, engineers and planners, innovative at the time but since widely copied. Ground-breaking too was the early adoption of computer-aided design, pioneered by our School of Architecture.

Under Bob Adams’ leadership the practice designed schools, parts of this University – including the Goodwin Athletics Centre and the innovative Medico-Legal Centre, several Sheffield hospitals and a wide range of commercial buildings. Conservation was also important involving much persistence, for example the seven years’ negotiations with the 32 interested parties in Paradise Square in Sheffield, a project which finally got underway when a building collapsed! Our honorary graduand was also keen to ensure buildings worked for disabled people, using a prestigious Winston Churchill Fellowship to look at design for the visually impaired in the USA and completing a Master’s thesis on the issue.

Vice-Chancellor, Bob Adams has undertaken major pro bono roles for his professional institutes. He served RIBA for over three decades, including membership of the Education Board and the Council, holding posts of Honorary Treasurer, Honorary Librarian and Curator of Drawings. He chaired the Architects’ Registration Council of the UK, safeguarding high standards of professional practice, and served on overseas’ registration bodies. On the Council for National Academic Awards, he oversaw architecture and planning degrees awarded by the former polytechnics. He was a government appointee on the Peak National Park Authority Board and a long-serving Sheffield magistrate.

Our honorary graduand also played a leading role in architectural and planning education at this University. Convinced that built environment professionals should be educated together he urged the University to set up a separate Faculty of Architectural Studies, with new departments of Building Science, Landscape, and Town and Regional Planning joining the existing School of Architecture. In particular, he wanted the University to establish ‘TRP’ (as the School of Planning became affectionately known) because the country was desperately short of a well-educated cadre of planners.

He secured government funding for the Sheffield Centre for Environmental Research, becoming its founding Director and helping it become a foundation for the Faculty’s major research achievements, including effective dissemination to the policy and practice communities. This was long before ‘research impact’ became a fashionable academic driver and a metric upon which our reputation and core research funding now depends.

Vice-Chancellor, in 2008 our School of Architecture celebrated its centenary. It is ranked second in the UK, committed to diversity and educating architects who are entrepreneurial self-starters, expert in political and social engagement, research and business skills – just the kind of architects that Bob Adams wanted the University to educate. Indeed, one of our graduates, Paul Monaghan, led the team that won last year’s Stirling Prize. In 2015 our Department of Town and Regional Planning was rechristened Urban Studies and Planning, and celebrated its 50th birthday. It is now the UK’s premier planning school, evidenced by its number one rankings in research, public policy impact, teaching quality, student satisfaction and the impact its alumni are having on their profession.

Both schools pride themselves on promoting social justice through good architecture and planning, and have worked closely together, including an innovative dual degree in architecture and planning, and a newly formed Urban Institute encouraging joint effort across the University to tackle the challenging problems facing cities worldwide. This is just the kind of collaboration that Bob Adams applauds and encourages. None of it would have happened without his foresight and early support. As his mentor, Professor Sir Patrick Abercrombie, wrote in the preface to the *Great London Plan*, ‘courage is needed to seize the moment when it arrives and to make a resolute start’. Bob Adams did and we have built on it.

Vice-Chancellor, our honorary graduand has rightly been honoured for his distinguished contributions to the life of this and other countries, including the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Warsaw Cross of Valour and the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland. It is our turn to thank him and to celebrate his service to our professions. I now present George Robert Adams as eminently worthy to receive the degree of Doctor of Letters *honoris causa*.